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ABSTRACT

This booklet contains 10 short plays written especially for performance by spcial education students who ranged in age from five to ten and in academic level from kindergarten to fourth grade. The plays focus on promoting character development and topics include death, prejudice, manners, senior citizens, responsibility for others, and positive thinking. In each play, there is a flexible number of parts, and roles may be played by boys or girls. The roles are usually of equal length and importance. The plays usually take 10 to 15 minutes to perform, and a minimum amount of time is needed for practice. Dialogue does not have to be memorized. Props and costumes are not required. The situations presented in the plays parallel real life situations and provide a nonthreatening forum for class discussions; discussion questions following each play give students the opportunity to offer their own insights and personal examples of the problems presented and to find their own solutions. (CB)

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PLAYS FOR THE SPECIAL EDUCATION CLASSROOM

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10 Short Plays Designed To Promote Character Development

by

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INTRODUCTION

During one rainy afternoon when students in my self-contained Learning Disability / Behavioral Disorders classroom were busy writing "creepy" stories to suit the mood of the day, one student contemplated out loud whether or not his hero should be devoured by a werewolf or should survive and rescue a beautiful princess. His musings inspired me to a rather exaggerated rendition of Hamlet's "To be or not to be" soliloquy, which in turn led to a discussion about Shakespeare and plays in general. During our discussion, I discovered that most of my students, many from deprived homes, had never seen a play or acted in one. I suggested that we put one on, and the idea was greeted with the enthusiasm usually reserved for recess.

As I began looking at plays published for school use, I found that they did not meet the needs of my classroom. I needed plays with a flexible number of parts that could be performed by either sex since my classroom might have anywhere from three to eight pupils at any given time and always had far more boys than girls. I also needed plays that let everyone participate equally - a difficult problem because of the individual differences among my students, who ranged in age from five to ten and in academic level from kindergarten to fourth grade. Like all teachers, I also had time constraints and needed plays that took a minimum amount of time to practice and put on.

When it became evident that I was not going to find plays that met all my needs, I began writing my own, often with the direct involvement of my students. The best of these efforts are

included in Plays for the Special Education Classroom. Most of the plays take only 10 to 15 minutes to perform. Costumes and props are kept to a minimum, and dialogue is as close as possible to the students' natural speech. Students can usually rehearse and present a play within two class periods.

The plays have been especially designed to promote character development. Even though the plots may involve an assortment of talking animals and extraterrestrials, the situations presented parallel real-life ones, and I have found the plays to be a non-threatening forum for class discussions. Discussion questions following each play give students the opportunity to offer their own insights and personal examples of the problems presented and, most importantly, to find their own solutions.

The "script" for each play consists of an outline, a description of the setting, questions teachers can ask to encourage students to make up their own dialogue, sample dialogue students can use until they become adept at making up their own, discussion questions, and, where appropriate, suggestions for follow-up activities.

Some Tips for Effective Use of the Plays

The first thing teachers should do is read and discuss the plot outline with their students. Then they should use the dialogue cues to encourage students to make up their own dialogue. Students reluctant to participate may be "warmed up" to theater by being asked to pantomime various activities or portray certain characters.

When students first tackle a play, they usually find it difficult to make up sentences and sometimes have to be given

dialogue, but it is not long before they become adept at making up their own dialogue. I always make it clear that students are not expected to repeat their dialogue word-for-word every time the play is practiced or put on. That way, even the most severely learning disabled student will be able to participate in the play since he or she generally is able to remember the essence of dialogue he or she chooses, if not the exact words. One child might be able to make up complex sentences, while another might be capable of only one-word utterances. All responses, however, are equally respected.

Although the plays do not require costuming or elaborate sets, teachers may include them if time permits. One simple bit of staging that I have used successfully is backdrops. The cast may paint a background scene on a large sheet of butcher block paper and pin the backdrop to a blackboard. Backdrops do not take much time to prepare but contribute greatly to the group spirit of the cast. Our performances usually take place in front of the classroom. The backdrop is pinned to the blackboard behind the "stage area."

Costumes generally can be quite simple. Local thrift shops are a good source for adult jackets, dresses, and hats. Construction paper can be used for webbed feet or dogs' ears, and a rolled up tube of paper can be an alien's third arm. Other extraterrestrial features, such as an eye on a cheek, can be added with water-based paints.

The plays can be performed before classmates, members of other classes, teachers, principals, parents, and others. If time and student abilities permit, several of the plays can be

presented together to create a "variety show."

Sometimes members of the cast may be too shy to perform before a group other than their own classmates. This problem can be solved by videotaping the production and then playing the tape for the chosen audience. Children love becoming television "stars," and some eventually may be able to become "directors" and do the videotaping themselves.

Above all, have fun. Although a well polished play may impress parents, principals, and other teachers, try not to impose dialogue or actions on unwilling "actors." Instead, give directions when necessary but let the students express their own version of each play. Everyone will enjoy the experience more.

Charlotte Gibberman

PREJUDICE

Plot Outline: A group of students meet two aliens who have just landed on earth. When the students first see the aliens, they are fighting. The aliens are fighting because one has blue cheeks and the other has green cheeks - otherwise the two are identical. The students cannot understand why the aliens hate each other. They try to convince the aliens that they are more alike than different, but the aliens refuse to listen to reason. A serious problem arises, and the aliens can only survive by helping each other. Despite the urgings of the students, the aliens refuse to help each other - and the students learn how senseless and dangerous prejudice can be.

Setting: A park in a residential neighborhood.

Costumes: Have fun making your "aliens." Our aliens had two construction paper eyes taped on their foreheads, a paper "third" arm pinned to their shirts, and large, yellow construction paper "feet" taped around their ankles.

[Two aliens enter from opposite sides of the stage. They slowly back up towards each other and then turn and face each other simultaneously. They are surprised to see each other]

[Teacher: The two aliens are upset to see each other on earth. They hate each other because they have different colored cheeks. What do you think they would say to each other when they meet?]

Alien #1: What are you doing here?

Alien #2: What are you doing here?

Alien #1: I was here first.

Alien #2: I was here first.

Alien #1: Why don't you just go back where you came from?

Alien #2: No way I'm going back. Why should I?

Alien #1: Because we don't want any blue cheeks around here.

Alien #2: You have some nerve talking, you, you - green cheek!

[The two aliens start shoving each other. A group of students enters from stage left, but the aliens are too busy arguing to notice.]

[Teacher: What are some things the students might say when they see the aliens?]

Student #1: Look at that!

Student #2: Monsters!

Student #3: Maybe we should run.

Student #4: They don't look like they can hurt us.

Student #1: Where do you think they came from?

Student #2: I don't know, but I hope they go back to wherever it is.

[Teacher: How might the students react to the aliens' argument?]

Student #3: What do you think they're doing?

Student #4: Looks like they're arguing.

Student #1: Maybe that's just the way they talk.

Student #2: (speaking to Student #3) Why don't you go over and talk to them?

[Teacher: How would you answer, Student #3, if you were scared?]

Student #3: No way. <u>You</u> go over and talk to them.

[Teacher: How would you answer, Student #4, if you were brave?]

Student #4: I'll do it. (starts moving towards aliens)

[Teacher: What would friends say to Student #4?]

Student #1: Be ca.eful.

Student #2: Yeah.

Student #3: Right.

[Teacher: How do you introduce yourself to an alien?]

Student #4: (goes up and taps one of the aliens on the shoulder) Excuse me, sir, uh, ma'am.

[The aliens turn around in amazement]

[Teacher: If you had never met an earthling before, what do you think you'd say?]

Alien #1: What are you?

Student #4: I'm (gives name).

Alien #2: What a strange looking creature.

Alien #1: I never heard of a (gives student's name).

Alien #2: Maybe it's some kind of plant.

[Teacher: What would you say, Student #4?]

Student #4: I'm not a plant. I'm a kid.

[The other students join Student #4]

Alien #1: Then take me to your leader.

Alien #2: No, take me to your leader!

Student #1: I don't know who my leader is, but I could take you to my mom.

Alien #1: I guess that would be okay.

Alien #2: Take me first!

Student #2: Why can't we take you guys together? Are you enemies or something?

Alien #1: No, we never saw each other before.

Student #3: Then how come you won't go with each other?

Alien #2: I'm not going with any green cheek.

Alien #1: You won't catch me with any blue cheek.

Student #4: Don't you two come from the same planet?

Alien #1: Yes, we're both from (make up a name), but we're not the same.

Alien #2: Can't you see how different we are?

[Teacher: How are they alike?]

Student #1: You both have four eyes ...

Student #2: ... and two ears ...

Student #3: ... and three arms ...

Student #4: ... and big yellow feet.

Alien #1: But look at his blue cheeks.

Alien #2: What are you talking about? Look at his green cheeks.

Student #1: So?

Alien #1: Everyone knows green cheeks are better than blue cheeks.

Alien #2: No way. Blue cheeks are better than green cheeks.

(The two aliens start shoving each other again)

[Teacher: What can you say to stop them from fighting?]

Student #2: Knock it off.

Student #3: Quit fighting.

Student #4: Who cares what color your cheeks are? Why can't you be friends?

Alien #1: I'll never be friends with a blue cheek.

Alien #2: I'll never be friends with a green cheek.

Student #1: Why not?

Alien #1: We're different.

Alien #2: Yeah, we're different.

[Teacher: Let's see if they are really different. What could you ask them about the way they live?]

Student #2: Do you eat different food?

[Aliens can make up silly answers to the questions but should always make sure their answers agree]

Alien #1: My favorite food is a hot chocolate sundae covered with mustard and ketchup.

Alien #2: That's my favorite, too.

Student #3: Where do you sleep?

Alien #1: I sleep standing on my head in a bathtub filled with jello.

Alien #2: Me, too.

Student #4: What kind of house do you live in?

Alien #1: I live in a big plastic bubble that hangs from a tree.

Alien #2: That's where I live, too.

Student #1: Do you go to school?

Alien #1: I go to the Intergalactic Extra-Terrestrial Grade School #4.

Alien #2: Me, too.

Student #2: Now I'm really confused. Everything about you two is the same except for the color of your cheeks. Who cares what color your cheeks are?

Alien #1: Obviously you earthlings are too stupid to understand.

[Teacher: How would you react to that comment?]

Student #3: You're the stupid one. What difference does it make what color your cheeks are?

Student #4: Yeah, you're the stupid ones.

[Teacher: The aliens are tired of arguing with the students. What do you think they would say?]

Alien #1: Enough of this! Take us to your leader.

[Teacher: The aliens try to walk but can't. What might they say?]

Alien #1: I can't move my feet!

Alien #2: Neither can I! It must be this planet's gravity.

Alien #1: I'm feeling weak.

Alien #2: I'm starting to fall.

Alien #1: Help me. I'll die if my head touches the ground.

[Teacher: The students rush over to help, but the aliens are surprisingly heavy. What might the students say?]

Student #1: I can't believe how heavy they are.

Student #2: We're going to need some help.

Student #3: But if we go for help, they'll fall.

Student #4: (to aliens) Why don't you hold onto each other? It might help.

Alien #1: I will not hold onto a blue cheek!

Alien #2: I will not hold onto a green cheek!

[Teacher: What do you think the students would say?]

Student #1: Don't be stupid.

Student #2: You'll die if you don't help each other.

Student #3: You've got to try.

Student #4: Come on.

Alien #1: Over my dead body.

Alien #2: Never.

[The aliens sink towards the ground and finally touch it and die]

[Teacher: What might the students say?]

Student #1: I can't believe it.

Student #2: They wouldn't help each other.

Student #3: Just because their cheeks were a different color.

Student #4: Come on, we better tell someone what happened.

(Students exit)

Discussion Questions

1. How were the two aliens alike?
2. How were they different?
3. Were they more alike or more different from each other?
4. Why did they hate each other? Do you think the color of someone's cheeks is a reason to hate him or her?
5. Do you look like everybody in this room? How are you different? (Encourage the students to note differences other than skin color such as height and hair and eye color) How are you alike? (Encourage the students to discuss similarities in appearance and lifestyle)
6. Hating someone just because they look different from you is called prejudice. Were the aliens prejudiced?
7. How did prejudice hurt the aliens?
8. Can you think of any examples of prejudice on this planet?
9. Do you think prejudice can hurt you? Can it hurt others?
10. How do you think you could help people stop being prejudiced?

THE BLIND STUDENT

Plot Outline: A blind student is about to join the class. Before the student enters the classroom, the teacher answers questions the other students have about their new classmate. When the blind student first comes into the classroom, some students make fun of their new classmate. Others try to be so nice that they won't let the student do anything. Both groups end up hurting the new student but finally learn the best way to treat handicapped students.

Setting: A classroom. This play is unusual in that the "stage" is the entire classroom and the teacher has a role. There is still a core group of students who will act out specific roles, but they will act from their desks in the classroom, not on the stage. To avoid confusion, make sure you tell the rest of the class that they are going to see a play and that while you hope they will be an "active" audience you do not want them to speak during the play.

Teacher: Class, we're getting a new student today.

[Teacher: How do you think the students would react?]

Student #1: All right.

Student #2: What's his name?

Student #3: Maybe it's a girl.

Student #4: Okay, what's her name?

Teacher: His (her) name is Terry. Terry's family has just moved into (name of town), and Terry will probably be a little nervous, so I want you all to make him (her) feel comfortable in our class. It's going to take some extra special effort because Terry is blind.

[Teacher: What kinds of questions do you think students would have about Terry's blindness?]

Student #1: If Terry's blind, how is he (she) going to get to class?

Teacher: Today somebody will have to help him (her), but pretty soon he'll (she'll) be able to find his (her) way by himself (herself).

Student #2: How's he (she) going to do that?

Teacher: Have you ever tried to walk around your house when the lights are off? It's a little scary at first, but pretty soon you remember where the tables and chairs are and how to find your way to your room. Well, Terry will learn how many steps it is from the front door to our classroom or from our classroom to the playground. He'll (she'll) learn where all the desks are in our room, and soon he'll (she'll) be able to get around by himself (herself). But we will have to help him (her) for the first few days, and, remember, after Terry has learned where everything is in our room, you shouldn't move anything without telling him (her) first.

Student #3: But how can he (she) be in our class if he (she) can't read?

Teacher: Terry will use "special" books. Some of them will be in braille. Braille letters are written as tiny bumps that Terry can feel with his (her) fingers. Some of his (her) other books will be on tape so that Terry can listen to them. Maybe some of you will be able to tape some stories for Terry.

Student #4: I'd like to do that.

Teacher: Thank you, (student's name). I'm sure Terry would like that.

Student #1: How can he (she) have fun on the playground? I mean he (she) can't play baseball or anything.

Teacher: Just because he (she) can't see doesn't mean that there's anything else wrong with his (her) body. He (she) can still run and jump - he (she) can even play baseball.

Student #2: How can he (she) do that?

Teacher: There's a special ball that makes a sound - sort of a "beep-beep." Terry will be able to hit it and catch it because he'll (she'll) be able to hear it.

Student #3: Neat!

Teacher: Terry's probably here by now. (Student's name), would you please go and get Terry?

[Student exits out the classroom door and returns with Terry, who has been waiting outside the door. Since it is difficult for sighted persons to accurately portray a blind person, it is best to put a blindfold on the student who is playing Terry. He or she should be wearing a jacket and carrying some books.]

Teacher: Thank you, (student's name). Welcome to our class, Terry. (Student returns to seat) (Teacher takes Terry by the arm and guides

Terry to desk by giving Terry appropriate verbal cues, e.g., your desk is the second from the door, etc. Terry sits down.) Oh, I forgot to bring your tape recorder. I'll be right back. (Teacher exits behind screen that has been set up near classroom door)

[Teacher: If some students wanted to be really nasty to Terry, what do you think they would say or do?]

Nasty #1: Let's see if he's (she's) really blind.

Nasty #2: How are we going to do that?

Nasty #3: Watch me. (Nasty #3 goes up to Terry and waves his or her hands in front of Terry's face. Terry doesn't react.)

Nasty #4: Hey, this could be fun! (The nasty students gather around Terry and make silly faces)

Terry: What's going on?

Nasty #1: Can't you see? (The nasty students all giggle)

[Teacher: If you didn't like what the nasty students were doing, what could you say?]

Too-Good #1: Don't worry. It's just some dumb kids trying to show how dumb they can be. My name is (student's name). (Nasty students sit down)

Terry: I'm Terry.

[Teacher: If someone wanted to be nice to Terry, what could they say or do?]

Too-Good #1: If you need help with anything, just ask.

[Teacher: If Terry appreciates the offer but wants to learn to do things for himself (herself), what do you think he (she) would say?]

Terry: Thanks, but I have to learn to do things for myself. (Terry reaches for books on his or her desk and accidentally drops one on the floor. He or she begins to pick it up, but the Too-Good students won't let him or her. Instead, they insist on doing everything for Terry.)

[Teacher: What do you think the Too-Good students would say to Terry?]

Too-Good #2: Don't bother. I'll get it for you.

Too-Good #3: I'll show you which book you'll need first.

Too-Good #4: I'll turn to the right page.

Terry: (uncomfortable with all the attention) Could someone please show me where my locker is? (starts to remove jacket) I'd like to put my jacket in my locker.

[Teacher: What would the Too-Good students say?]

Too-Good #1: (grabbing Terry's jacket) Don't worry. I'll put it away for you.

Too-Good #2: (taking Terry's jacket from Too-Good #1) I'll put it away.

[Teacher: If the Too-Good students start fighting over who will put Terry's jacket away, what do you think they'd say?]

Too-Good #3: (taking the jacket from Too-Good #2) No, let me.

Too-Good #4: (taking the jacket from Too-Good #3) No, let me.

Too-Good #1: (trying to take the jacket away from Too-Good #4) <u>I'll</u> put it away.

[Teacher: Terry is angry because they won't let him (her) put his (her) jacket away. What do you

think Terry would say?]

Terry: Give me my jacket. If you'd just show me where my locker is, I can put my own jacket away. I thought you guys wanted to help me.

[Teacher "re-enters" the classroom to lead the discussion]

Discussion Questions

1. Many of you laughed when some students made faces at Terry. Why do you think you laughed? The faces they made were funny, but do you think what they did was funny? Why not?
2. Some of the students tried very hard to do things for Terry, but Terry said they weren't helping him (her). What do you think he (she) meant?
3. What are some really helpful things the students could do for Terry?

Follow up

A good way to follow up on this play is to bring some braille books to the class plus any other special aids that are available for blind students. If time permits, you might teach the students the proper way to lead a blind person:

Let the blind person walk on your right side and hold onto your right elbow. The sighted person should walk slightly ahead and give directions to the blind person (e.g., "Here are the stairs").

The students might want to practice leading each other around the room. One student may lead while the other wears a blindfold.

IN THE DOG HOUSE

Plot Outline: This play takes place in an animal shelter. Different kinds of animals discuss why they were abandoned. In most cases, the people simply did not want to take care of them. Each waits hopefully to be adopted.

Setting: An animal shelter. Two dogs are sitting forlornly on a table that has been set up center stage. Encourage the students to use appropriate animal mannerisms (e.g., a "cat" could groom himself or herself; dogs might want to scratch). All animals should punctuate their conversations with appropriate meows and barks.

[A keeper enters from stage left leading a "cat" by the "paw." The keeper draws near the "cage" and pantomimes opening a door. The "cat" jumps up on the table, and the keeper shuts the door.]

Keeper: This will be your new home for a few days. Be good! (Keeper exits stage left)

Rover: Hi, kid. My name's Rover, and this here (pointing to the other dog) is Treasure.

Treasure: Welcome to the pound.

Cat: (sadly) Sorry, but I don't have a name. No one ever bothered to give me one. I sure wish I was someplace else.

Rover: What are you in for?

[Teacher: Why might someone abandon a kitten?]

Cat: I had too many brothers and sisters.

Treasure: They put you in here for having too many brothers and sisters?

Cat: My mom had so many kittens that the people we lived with couldn't find enough people to give us all a home. They didn't want to take care of all of us, so they brought me here.

Rover: Tough luck, kid.

Cat: How did you end up here?

[Teacher: What are some reasons people might have for giving up an animal?]

Rover: The people I lived with just got tired of taking care of me.

Cat: What happened?

[Teacher: What promises might kids make to their parents in order to get a dog?]

Rover: When I first came to live with them, the kids said they'd feed me, give me baths, and take me for walks. But they got tired and kept making up excuses.

Cat: What kind of excuses?

[Teacher: What kinds of excuses could kids make up to avoid taking care of their dog?]

Rover: Oh, you know. When they were supposed to feed me, they said they were late for school. When they were supposed to take me for a walk, they said they had to do their homework. And when it was time for my bath, they always had to go practice the piano. Their mom and dad didn't want to take care of me either, so they brought me here.

Cat: (to Treasure) What about you? Why are you here?

[Teacher: What are some other reasons people would give up their dog?]

Treasure: They said I barked too much. What did they expect me to do - whisper? (Treasure begins a "whisper bark." They all laugh for a few seconds, then become sad.)

Cat: What's going to happen to us?

Rover: They'll keep us for a few more days, but if nobody comes to adopt us then (makes cutting motion across the neck).

Cat: They'll kill us!

Treasure: (shakes head slowly but affirmatively). There's just too many animals that people don't want. They can't keep us here very long. They have to make room for others.

Cat: (sighs)

Rover: (pointing stage left) Don't give up. There are some people coming now!

[You have two options in this next scene. If you want to include more students, have two or three enter and act as if they are considering adopting a pet. The animals can talk and try to convince the people to adopt them, but the people should pretend they can't hear the animals. If you want to use fewer students, simply have the animals pretend they are being observed and do not introduce any other characters.]

Treasure: Maybe they'll adopt us. Smile! (The animals sit up straight and smile, looking very much like they want to be wanted.)

[Three people enter from stage left]

[Teacher: What are some things people might say while looking at the animals?]

Person #1: Look at that cute dog.

Person #2: I don't know. I think the other one is cuter.

Person #3: A cat might be nice.

[Teacher: What are some things the animals might say to convince the people to adopt them?]

Rover: Take me! I can do tricks. (rolls over) See?

Treasure: No, take me! I would make a great watch dog.

Cat: Take me! I don't bark, and I'm very clean.

[Teacher: If the people decide not to take any of the animals, what might they say?]

Person #1: I don't want any of these.

Person #2: They said there are more animals in the other room.

Person #3: Let's go.

[Teacher: What might the animals say as the people exit stage left?]

Rover: They're leaving!

Treasure: Don't go!

Cat: Please stay.

Rover: (resignedly) They're gone.

Treasure: What will we do?

Cat: There's nothing we can do.

[Teacher: As the animals hear the door opening again and think more people are coming, what do you think they would say?]

Rover: More people are coming!

Treasure: Maybe this time they'll take me!

Cat: Or me!

[The Keeper enters from stage left leading a rabbit and a chicken. The rabbit hops, and the chicken flaps its wings and thrusts its head forward rhythmically.]

Keeper: (pretending to open a cage door) Move over, guys. We have to squeeze some new animals in. (The rabbit and chicken get up on the table. The Keeper closes the door and exits stage right.)

Rover: What are you guys doing here?

Treasure: I've never seen a chicken in here before.

Cat: I've never even seen a chicken.

Rabbit: We were Easter presents.

Chicken: Some people thought it would be nice to let their kids have a baby chick for Easter.

Rabbit: Or a cute baby rabbit.

Chicken: But when we grew up, nobody wanted us anymore.

Rabbit: They didn't think we were cute anymore.

Rover: That's why we're here.

Treasure: Why are people so mean?

Cat: Some are mean, but a lot just don't think too much.

Rabbit: They like baby animals, but they forget we grow up and become big animals.

Chicken: That have to be taken care of.

[Once again, the animals hear the door open and people walk in.]

[Teacher: What do you think the animals would say now?]

Rover: More people are coming!

Treasure: They have to take me this time!

Cat: Or me!

Rabbit: Or me!

Chicken: Or all of us!

[The animals once again put on their best faces as the original group of people and the Keeper re-enter from stage right.]

[Teacher: What do you think they'll say to the people?]

Rover: I'll be a real good dog!

Treasure: I'll try not to bark.

Cat: I'll sleep curled up in your lap.

Rabbit: I won't make a sound.

Chicken: I'll give you fresh eggs every morning.

Person #1: (pointing to Rover) I think I'll take that one.

Person #2: He looks like a smart dog.

Person #3: And we'll be sure to take good care of him.

[The Keeper opens the cage, and Rover jumps out. The people pat Rover's head.]

Rover: They're taking me! (Rover starts to leave with the people. Rover turns to the other animals.) Good luck. I hope you get picked real soon.

[Teacher: What do you think the other animals would say to Rover?]

Treasure: Good bye! I'll miss you.

Cat: Be a good dog!

Rabbit: Don't be any trouble!

Chicken: Nice meeting you!

[The group exits. The remaining animals are sad that they

weren't chosen but hope they will be chosen next time.]

[Teacher: What do you think they would say?]

Treasure: I wish it was me.

Cat: Maybe next time.

Rabbit: Somebody might want us.

Chicken: Keep your fingers crossed.

[All the animals cross their fingers and turn their heads stage left waiting for more people to enter]

Discussion Questions

1. Why do people put animals in an animal shelter?
2. What happens to animals at the animal shelter?
3. What are some things you have to do to take care of pets? Why do you think people don't want to take care of their pets?
4. Do you have a pet? What do you do to take care of your pet?
5. Do you think people should have pets if they don't want to take care of them?

Follow up

After presenting this play, you might want to contact your local animal welfare agencies. Often they have volunteers who are willing to come and talk to classes about proper animal care. Many animal welfare agencies will also provide you with a variety of lesson plans and activities that can be used with your class.

IN THE GOOD OLD DAYS

This is a rather special play, but it will take some extra effort from the students. This play is designed to increase the students' awareness of older people and of their own family history. Before beginning this play, the students should ask their grandparents, older relatives, or neighbors to tell them what life was like when they were children and how their childhood differed from the students' lives. If the students do not have access to any older people, you may suggest that they ask their parents about their grandparents' childhood. Your students should also be instructed to ask the older people about the changes that come with age (e.g., What are some things that you can't do now that you used to be able to do? What are some bad things about growing older? What are some good things?). Once the students have collected their information, they will be ready to assume their roles - as their own grandparents!

Plot Outline: Four older people meet in a park. One of the older people is helping his or her grandchild with a school assignment. The assignment is to collect stories from older people about their childhoods. While his or her friends talk, the older person records their stories. They talk not only about their childhood but also about the problems and benefits of growing older.

Setting: A park. Four chairs are set up in a row center stage to form a park bench. One older person is already sitting on the

bench. Have the student pantomime feeding birds while making appropriate comments. The student should have a tape recorder with a microphone attached.

[O. P. = Older Person]

O. P. #1: Here's your breakfast. Come and get it. Hey, don't hog it all.

[From stage left, three more older people enter. The students should move a little slowly to give the appearance of age.]

[Teacher: Since all the older people know each other well, what do you think they'd say to each other when they meet?]

O. P. #1: There you are.

O. P. #2: How are you doing?

O. P. #1: Just fine. How are you?

[Teacher: What are some physical complaints older people might have?]

O. P. #2: I've been having some problems with my arthritis lately. (sits down)

O. P. #3: (sitting) I know. This weather's been terrible on my knees.

O. P. #4: I couldn't find my glasses this morning - I couldn't read a thing.

[Teacher: Older Person #1 doesn't like to hear the others complaining and wants them to help her grandchild with his project. What do you think Older Person #1 would say?]

O. P. #1: Stop complaining. Look what a beautiful day it is. Besides, I need you to do me a favor.

O. P. #2: What is it?

O. P. #1: My grandchild is writing a paper for school about what it was like when we were kids. Do you think you could help him (her)?

[Teacher: The older people are willing to help. What do you think they'd say?]

O. P. #2: Sure.

O. P. #3: Of course.

O. P. #4: Sounds like fun.

O. P. #1: I brought a tape recorder. You just talk, and I'll record what you say.

[Teacher: The older people are uncomfortable talking into a tape recorder and are not sure what to say. What do you think they would say?]

O. P. #2: I'm not sure what to say.

O. P. #3: I feel funny talking into that thing.

O. P. #4: What kinds of things do you want us to talk about?

O. P. #1: Just talk about anything you can remember about being a child.

O. P. #2: That was a long time ago.

O. P. #3: My memory's not so good anymore.

O. P. #4: I can tell you some stories.

O. P. #1: Wait. Let me turn on the tape recorder. (turns on tape recorder) Okay, go ahead. (holds microphone out to Older Person #4)

[The students should now begin telling some of the stories they learned from an older person. The stories will vary considerably depending on the background of your students. While the student is talking, encourage the other students to interrupt with appropriate questions or comments.]

O. P. #4: Let's see (pauses to think). When I was a child, I lived on a farm in Missouri and had lots of chores to do. I used to get up at five o'clock in the morning to help my dad feed the cows. Then I had to walk to school because we didn't have any buses. You had to

watch real careful where you walked or else you might step on a rattlesnake.

O. P. #1: Rattlesnake?

O. P. #4: Big ones. I killed one once.

O. P. #2: How'd you do that?

O. P. #4: I was helping Mom with the garden, and I was right in the middle of some sweet peas when I heard a rattle.

O. P. #3: What did you do?

O. P. #4: I took a hoe, raised it high over my head, and whomp! No more rattlesnake.

O. P. #1: I don't believe you.

O. P. #4: I've got the skin to prove it. Gave it to my grandchild for good luck.

O. P. #2: I lived on a farm, too.

O. P. #3: I didn't know that.

O. P. #2: It wasn't much of a farm. It was really pretty small. My dad used to raise cotton there, and my brothers and sisters and I used to help out.

O. P. #4: Do you miss the farm?

O. P. #2: I miss some of the people I used to know, but I don't miss the hard work, and I don't miss what life was like for us back then.

O. P. #3: What was it like?

O. P. #2: In those days, black kids couldn't go to school with white kids. They couldn't even drink out of the same drinking fountain.

When black people got on buses, they always had to sit in the back. I don't miss any of that. I like things better the way they are now.

O. P. #3: Things are sure a lot better for me now than they were when I was a child. You know I was born in a little village in Poland. We didn't have bathrooms or running water. If you wanted to take a bath, you had to get water out of the well and heat it up on the stove. We didn't take too many baths.

O. P. #1: When did you come to the United States?

O. P. #3: I came here after World War II. I didn't speak any English, and I remember how strange I thought everything was in America. I couldn't believe there was so much food ... and water - right in the house. My father opened a little grocery store, and we lived behind it. When customers came in, I would ask them how to say things in English. Pretty soon I could speak English like all my American friends. It was terrible in Poland during the war. It's much better here. I've had a good life, and I'm enjoying it even more now.

[Teacher: What are some good things about growing older? What are some things older people can do that they couldn't do when they were younger?]

O. P. #3: Since I retired, I have more time to do things I enjoy.

O. P. #4: And I have time to take classes, to visit with my children and grandchildren, and to do my hobbies.

O. P. #2: I still work part-time. But I love having time to travel. There are still lots of places I want to visit.

O. P. #3: I'm a lot smarter now than I was when I was younger. I don't make as many mistakes as I did when I was younger.

O. P. #2: I'm able to enjoy life more. I don't get so upset with things. I've learned to relax.

O. P. #1: Speaking of things to do, we better hurry or we'll be late for our exercise class. (All exit stage left)

Discussion Questions

1. The older people in our play talked about their childhood. How was it different from yours?
2. Have your grandparents told you any stories about their childhood? What were they?
3. Do you think you would have liked to be a child when they were children? Why or why not?
4. What are some bad things about growing older?
5. What are some good things?
6. What do you think you'll be doing when you're an older person?

DANNY'S (DENA'S) DOG

Plot Outline: Danny's (or Dena's) dog Sheba has died, and Danny is very upset. His friends try to cheer him up by talking about what a great dog Sheba was, but Danny doesn't want to talk about her. Instead, Danny's friends start telling him stories about their pets and convince Danny that he would feel better if he talked about Sheba. When he finally talks about her, Danny remembers how brave Sheba was when a robber tried to break into his house, and the play ends with Danny thinking about getting another dog.

Setting: Group of students standing around and talking on a residential street. Student #1 enters from stage left.

[Teacher: Student #1 tells the other students that Danny's (Dena's) dog has died. How might the students respond?]

Student #1: Bad news, guys.

Student #2: What's wrong?

Student #1: Danny's (Dena's) dog Sheba died.

Student #3: What happened?

Student #4: Did she get run over?

Student #1: No, Danny (Dena) said she died in her sleep.

You know, she was pretty old.

Student #2: How old was she?

Student #1: Sixteen.

Student #3: Boy, she really was old. Sixteen for a dog

is like 112 for a human.

Student #4: I hope my dog lives that long.

[Danny (Dena) enters from stage right. He (she) looks sad.]

Danny (Dena): (listlessly) Hi.

[Teacher: What could the students say to cheer him (her) up?]

All students: (looking embarrassed) Hi. How are you doing?

Student #1: Listen, we're sorry about Sheba.

Student #2: Yeah, she was a really great dog.

[Teacher: What are some games Sheba might have liked to play?]

Student #3: Remember how good she was at catching a frisbee?

Student #4: She was really good at going after sticks.

Danny (Dena): I don't want to talk about her.

Student #1: Okay. Do you think you're going to get another dog?

Danny (Dena): (angry) No way. I'm never going to get another dog.

Student #2: How come?

[Teacher: Why might Danny (Dena) not want another dog?]

Danny (Dena): Because if I get another dog, she's going to die just like Sheba.

Student #3: But Sheba lived a long time.

Danny (Dena): Not long enough.

Student #4: I thought you loved Sheba.

Danny (Dena): What are you talking about? You know I did.

Student #1: Then how come you don't want to talk about her?

Danny (Dena): Because it makes me sad.

Student #2: But if you don't talk about her, it's like she wasn't ever around.

Student #3: Come on, there's got to be some great things you can remember about Sheba.

[Teacher: What are some stories the students could tell about their pet that died?]

Student #4: I remember how my cat liked to mess up my mom's knitting.

Student #1: I had a hamster that loved to run around and around in circles.

Student #2: I had a turtle who used to beg for flies.

[Teacher: If Danny (Dena) didn't want to hear about their pets, what do you think he'd (she'd) say?]

Danny (Dena): Why don't you all drop it?

[Teacher: One time Sheba scared away a man who was bothering the kids. How might the students tell the story?]

Student #3: I remember that time a creepy man kept following us while we were walking and Sheba scared him away.

Student #4: I don't think he stopped running until he was clear out of town. (All laugh)

[Teacher: Sheba also scared away a burglar once. How might Danny (Dena) tell the story?]

Danny (Dena): That wasn't the only time Sheba helped somebody. One time my mom and I saw somebody hanging around the house when it was dark outside. We were real scared, but as soon as Sheba heard him, she started barking and

growling real loud and scratched at the door. When we let her out, she ran towards the guy, but he just barely got over the fence before she could get to him. He would have been dead if she'd caught up to him.

[Teacher: What are some other good things about having a dog?]

Student #1: Sounds like it's really good to have a dog.

Student #2: When you have a dog, there's always somebody around to play with you.

Student #3: And there's always somebody around to love you.

Student #4: Where did you get Sheba?

Danny (Dena): She came from the pound.

Student #1: I bet there are a lot of great dogs down at the pound.

Student #2: And I bet there's one that would like to be Danny's (Dena's) dog. What do you think, Danny (Dena)?

Danny (Dena): I wouldn't want another dog to take Sheba's place. Sheba was special.

Student #3: This dog won't be Sheba, but she can be special, too.

Student #4: If somebody left the dog at the pound, I bet the dog would really want somebody to love her.

Danny (Dena): Maybe you're right. I'll have to ask Mom, but I'm sure she'll say yes. Thanks, guys. I

feel much better.

Student #1: Let's go over to my house. My mom said she was going to make some cookies. (All exit)

Discussion Questions

1. Why didn't Danny (Dena) want to talk about Sheba?
2. Did you ever have a pet that died? Did you want to talk about your pet?
3. Did you like having a pet? What were some of the good things about having a pet?
4. Do you think Danny (Dena) felt better after talking about Sheba? Why?
5. Do you think Danny (Dena) will forget about Sheba if he (she) gets another dog? Why or why not?

SOUR GRAPES

Plot Outline: Hardworking Hannah (or Harry) just received her first 100 on a spelling test. Her friends are happy for her, but the Spoiler comes and tries to make her feel bad by telling her that a good grade in spelling doesn't mean anything. Hardworking Hannah and her friends, however, prove to the Spoiler how important spelling can be and offer some tips on how to improve the Spoiler's spelling and, most importantly, on how to be a friend.

Setting: Outside a school, a group of students are standing center stage waiting for a bus. Suddenly, another student enters waving a paper energetically.

[Teacher: What would you say if you got your first 100% on a spelling test?]

Hardworking: I did it! I did it! I finally got a hundred on a spelling test.

[Teacher: What would good friends say?]

Friend #1: That's great!

Friend #2: Right on!

Friend #3: (extending a hand) Give me five! (they slap hands)

Friend #4: Okay, okay, what's your secret?

Hardworking: You know how I kept missing lots of words

every time we took a test? Well, this time ....

[Teacher: What would someone say if he or she were jealous of Hardworking's score?]

The Spoiler: Nobody cares what you got on that stupid test.

[Teacher: What would Hardworking's friends say?]

Friend #1: Hey, speak for yourself.

Friend #2: Yeah, I'd like to get a couple hundreds on my tests.

[Teacher: What else could the Spoiler say?]

The Spoiler: Big deal. A hundred. Anybody can get a hundred on a test.

[Teacher: The other students know that the Spoiler has never done well in spelling. What might they say?]

Friend #3: I haven't seen any on your tests lately.

Friend #4: Yeah, I thought you said it was easy.

[Teacher: How might the Spoiler respond?]

The Spoiler: The only reason I don't get hundreds is because I don't want them.

Hardworking: Why don't you want to know how to spell?

The Spoiler: Who needs it?

Hardworking: You do.

The Spoiler: What for?

[Teacher: What are some of the things you need good spelling for?]

Hardworking: For everything. For writing letters, papers. How else are you going to get into college?

The Spoiler: College is for jerks. I'm going to be a truck driver.

[Teacher: Why might a truck driver need to know how to

spell?]

Friend #1: Boy, you are a jerk if you think truck drivers don't have to know how to spell.

Friend #2: How do you think you're going to fill out a job application if you can't spell?

Friend #3: Truck drivers have to fill out lots of forms.

The Spoiler: I'm not going to be some teacher's pet just to get a hundred in spelling.

Friend #4: What are you talking about?

The Spoiler: You know what I'm talking about.

Hardworking: If you think I got a hundred because the teacher likes me, you're really full of it. I got a hundred because I studied hard, and I'm going to keep studying hard so I can get more hundreds. And if you had any brains, you'd do the same thing.

The Spoiler: (looking sheepish) It wouldn't help me.

[Teacher: How could Hardworking's friends encourage the Spoiler?]

Friend #1: Sure it would.

Friend #2: Give it a try.

Friend #3: You could be smart if you wanted to.

The Spoiler: (to Hardworking) Okay, how'd you do it?

[Teacher: What are some good ways to study for a spelling test?]

Hardworking: Simple. I went over the words a few times myself. Then I asked my mom to give me the words. We worked on them until I could get them all right.

The Spoiler: My mom doesn't have time for that stuff.

[Teacher: How could Hardworking help the Spoiler?]

Hardworking: I've got some time when I go home. How 'bout we study together.

The Spoiler: Well, maybe I'll give it a try.

Friend #4: Good idea. Here comes the bus. (group exits stage left)

Discussion Questions

1. How did Hardworking feel about getting a hundred on the test? Why was this hundred special?
2. How did Hardworking's friends act when they heard about the hundred?
3. How did the Spoiler react? Why do you think the Spoiler reacted that way? Do you think the Spoiler really didn't care about getting a hundred?
4. How do you think the Spoiler made Hardworking feel? Would you want the Spoiler as a friend?
5. If the Spoiler felt bad because he or she wasn't good in spelling, what could the Spoiler have done instead of putting down Hardworking?
6. Have you ever put somebody down because that person could do something you couldn't do? What could you have done instead of putting down that person?

THE MANNERS GAME

Plot Outline: This play concerns a game show called "The Manners Game." During the game, contestants are asked to give the polite response in a variety of situations.

Setting: A TV game show. Three desks and chairs are set up center stage. The chairs should be set up in front of a large blackboard, or a small blackboard can be set up nearby. "Contestant #1," "Contestant #2," and "Contestant #3" should be written on the blackboard. Another desk should be set up at stage left. If you have a lectern, set it on this desk. Otherwise, this desk should also have a chair. The three contestants are seated center stage. The game show host is seated or standing at the remaining desk. A scorekeeper stands at the blackboard. Each time a student answers a question correctly, the scorekeeper should put a mark under the contestant's name. Throughout the "game," the host should keep up appropriate banter (e.g., "The score is tied," "Contestant #2 is now leading," etc.).

Host: (speaking to the audience) Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to "The Manners Game." I'm your host, (student's name). We're going to have a lot of fun today. And here to help us have that fun are our contestants. Contestant #1, tell us about yourself.

Contestant #1: I'm (own or made-up name). I (make up something you do).

Host: How about you, Contestant #2?

Contestant #2: I'm (own or made-up name). I (make up something you do).

Host: And last but not least, Contestant #3.

Contestant #3: I'm (own or made-up name). I (make up something you do).

Host: Good luck to all of you and now on with the game! (Reading questions from cards)

Question number one is: You are eating mashed potatoes, and somebody asks you a question. What should you do?

[To answer questions, contestants press an imaginary buzzer on their desks and make appropriate "buzzing" noises. Remind students to respond appropriately depending on whether their answers are right or wrong.]

Contestant #1: Buzz. You answer the question!

Host: Wrong.

Contestant #2: Buzz. You wait until you've finished chewing and then you answer the question.

Host: Right you are. That's a point for Contestant #2. And now question number two: I should tell you first that this question has two right answers. Two people are busy talking to each other. You would like to talk to one of them. What should you do?

Contestant #2: Buzz. Butt right in!

Host: Wrong!

Contestant #3: Buzz. Wait until they're finished talking!

Host: Right! What else can you do?

Contestant #1: Buzz. Say excuse me!

Host: That's the second right answer. Looks like the scores are all tied up. So let's move on to question number three: You have just broken your mother's favorite lamp. What should you say?

Contestant #3: Buzz. (pointing to another contestant) He (she) did it!

Host: Wrong!

Contestant #2: Buzz. I don't know how it happened?

Host: Wrong. Care to guess, Contestant #1?

Contestant #1: Buzz. I broke the lamp. I didn't mean to do it. I'm sorry.

Host: Good answer! Give Contestant #1 another point. All right, time for another question: You have a big bag of cookies and some of your friends come along. What should you do?

Contestant #2: Buzz. Hide the cookies!

Host: Wrong! I sure wouldn't want you to be my friend.

Contestant #3: Buzz. Ask them if they'd like some!

Host: Correct. Now this next question is worth two points, so listen carefully: You call your friend Bobby White's house and his mother answers the phone. What should you say?

Contestant #1: Buzz. Is Bobby there?

Host: Sorry, that's not quite right.

Contestant #2: Buzz. Hello, Mrs. White. This is (name). May I please speak to Bobby?

Host: That's two points for Contestant #2. Looks like Contestant #2 is pulling ahead. Let's see if the others can catch up. You are handed a present. What should you say?

Contestant #3: Buzz. What's in it?

Host: Wrong!

Contestant #1: Buzz. Thank you!

Host: Right you are. Contestants #1 and #2 are

tied for first place. Come on, Contestant #3. Now listen carefully: You're at the dinner table and you want some milk that's on the other side of the table. What should you do?

Contestant #2: Buzz. Get up and get it!

Host: No!

Contestant #3: Buzz. Say, "Please pass the milk."

Host: That is correct! And the score is all tied up. What an exciting game, ladies and gentlemen. All right, let's see who's going to break this tie. You accidentally bump into someone. What should you say?

Contestant #1: Buzz. Why don't you look where you're going?

Host: Not very nice - and wrong.

Contestant #2: Buzz. Say, "Excuse me."

Host: Of course. Looks like Contestant #2 has taken the lead again. Now: What do you say when someone says, "Thank you"?

Contestant #3: Buzz. You're welcome!

Host: Good answer. And now for our last question. Contestants #2 and #3 are tied, but this last question is worth three points, so anybody can win. Now for the question that will decide the winner of this game: You have brought a new friend, Julie, to your house, and your mother comes to say hello. What should you say?

Contestant #1: Buzz. Uh ... uh.

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Host: Sorry, too late.

Contestant #2: Buzz. It's ... it's.

Host: Late again.

Contestant #3: Mom, I'd like you to meet my friend, Julie.

Host: Correct! Ladies and gentlemen, we have a winner - Contestant #3. Let's give Contestant #3 a big hand. (leads class in applause) And we'll be seeing you here tomorrow on "The Manners Game." Good bye!

Discussion Questions

1. Do you think good manners are important? Why or why not?
2. What do you think would happen if no one used good manners?

Follow up

A good follow up activity is to make your own version of "The Manners Game" and play it in small groups or with the whole class.

THINK POSITIVELY

Plot Outline: A group of students are excited about going on a field trip to the zoo. They are discussing all the fun things they are going to do when Pessimistic P (Perry or Petunia) starts telling them about all the bad things that could happen. Soon all the students are unhappy, and no one wants to go on the field trip. Fortunately, Optimistic O (Oscar or Odetta) arrives and reminds the students about all the fun things they can do even if something does go wrong. The students once again are happy to be going on the field trip, and even Pessimistic P learns that it can be more fun to think positively.

Setting: Playground after school.

[Teacher: The students have no school tomorrow because they are going on a field trip to the zoo. What do you think they might say about the field trip?]

Student #1: I can't wait until tomorrow.

Student #2: Yeah, no classes!

Student #3: I can't wait to see all the animals.

Student #4: Me, too. I love going to the zoo.

[Teacher: What could Pessimistic P say would be bad about taking the bus to the zoo?]

Pessimistic P: Yeah, but the bus ride is going to be terrible. You know how bumpy it is.

[Teacher: What would you say about that? What are some of the fun things you could do when you get to the zoo?]

Student #1: That's okay. Think how much fun we'll have when we get there.

Student #2: Remember? Everyone's supposed to bring a sack lunch so that we can have a picnic.

[Teacher: What could go wrong at the picnic?]

Pessimistic P: Picnics stink. I'm talking about sitting on the cold ground, eating cold sandwiches, and having ants crawl on your potato chips.

Student #3: Ants on your potato chips!

Student #4: Yech!

Pessimistic P: That's okay. We probably won't be able to go anyway.

Student #1: Why not?

Pessimistic P: The weather person said it's going to rain tomorrow.

Student #2: I didn't hear that.

Pessimistic P: It was on TV last night. There's a thirty percent chance of rain.

Student #3: (sadly) I guess we won't be going then.

[Teacher: What fun things could you do at the zoo even if it does rain?]

Student #4: Wait a minute. The teacher said there are still lots of animals we can see inside even if it rains.

Student #1: Right, there's all those animal houses.

Student #2: There's one for birds, one for lions, reptiles, elephants ... lots of different

animals.

[Teacher: What could Pessimistic P find wrong with visiting the animal houses?]

Pessimistic P: Have you ever been in an animal house?

Student #3: What's wrong with them?

Pessimistic P: The animals smell so bad, you can hardly breathe.

[Teacher: Now all of the students are unhappy. What other bad things could they say about the zoo?]

Student #4: You're right. The zoo won't be any fun.

Student #1: It's just for little kids.

Student #2: Who wants to see an old elephant, anyway.

Student #3: Just a bunch of smelly animals.

[The students stand silently. Each is looking sadder than the next when Optimistic O enters from stage left.]

[Teacher: Optimistic O is surprised to see everyone looking so sad. What might Optimistic O say?]

Optimistic O: How come you guys look so down? You look like you're sorry there's no school tomorrow. Don't you want to go on a field trip?

[Teacher: What are some of the bad things the students think will happen?]

Student #4: We won't be able to go.

Student #1: It's going to rain.

Student #2: Even if it doesn't rain, the ants will ruin everything.

Student #3: The sandwiches will be cold.

[Teacher: What could Optimistic O say to cheer everyone up?]

Optimistic O: What are you talking about? The weather

person said it <u>might</u> rain. That means it <u>might not</u>. And so what about some ants. We're going there to see animals. Why can't we look at some insects, too? Come on. The only way we're going to have fun is to think about all the great things that could happen.

[Teacher: What are some of the good things about going to the zoo?]

Student #4: (cheering up) Yeah, I bet they have some really great lions and tigers.

Student #1: And huge snakes!

Student #2: I want to see the alligators and crocodiles.

[Teacher: What is something fun that you could do in the rain?]

Student #3: If it rains, we could always play in the puddles.

Pessimistic P: But what about the ants?

Student #4: We'll bring some extra potato chips for them.

Student #1: That's a great idea! Let's go to the store and buy some. (Students start exiting)

Pessimistic P: Wait a minute. You forgot how bumpy the bus is going to be.

Optimistic O: You think about how bumpy the bus ride will be. We're going to have a great time! (Students laugh as they exit)

Pessimistic P: Maybe they're right. Maybe I could have fun. (Pessimistic P tries to smile, has some difficulty, but finally succeeds) Hey, wait for me. (exits)

Discussion Questions

1. The student who thought everything was going to be bad is called a "pessimist." If somebody gave a pessimist a candy bar, what do you think the pessimist would say? What if you gave the pessimist a hundred dollars?
2. The student who thought everything was going to be fun is called an "optimist." What do you think the optimist would say if he or she woke up and found two feet of snow on the ground - in the middle of July? What would an optimist do if he or she had to stay home and babysit instead of going out to play softball with friends?
3. Could all the bad things Pessimistic P said might happen really happen?
4. Were all the things really bad, or did Pessimistic P just think they were bad?
5. Who was happier, Pessimistic P or Optimistic O? Who would you rather have as a friend?

THE LIAR

Plot Outline: A group of students are discussing a movie about snakes. Lying L (Laura or Larry) wants to get the other students' attention, so Lying L pretends that there is a snake in his or her back yard. The other students want to see the snake, so Lying L has to keep making up more and more stories. Eventually, Lying L has to admit that he or she was lying. The other students become angry and leave Lying L alone.

Setting: Anywhere a group of students might congregate (e.g., playground, front yard). A group of students are talking excitedly. One student, Lying L, stands apart from the group.

[Teacher: You've just seen a movie about snakes. What could you say about it?]

Student #1: Boy, that movie was great.

Student #2: Yeah, did you see all of those snakes!

Student #3: Yech!

Student #4: And the way the one ate that mouse. One bite and (makes an exaggerated swallowing sound).

Lying L: (speaking to the group) That was really great. (The others ignore her)

Student #1: I wouldn't want to find one of those in my back yard.

Student #2: If I did, I would run a hundred miles - in two seconds (everyone laughs).

[Teacher: Lying L pretends to have a snake in his or her back yard. What would she say, and how would the others react?]

Lying L: I have one in my back yard. (group looks at her)

Student #3: You have what in your back yard?

Lying L: A snake. A really big snake.

Student #4: Oh, yeah. How big?

Lying L: (stretching his or her arms as wide as possible) About this long.

Student #1: That's not so long.

Lying L: (as if holding a basketball) But it's about that wide.

Student #2: (suspiciously) What kind of snake is it?

Lying L: You know, like in the movie, it's one of those boa ... boa contractors.

Student #3: That's boa <u>constrictor</u>. Don't you even know the name of your own snake?

Lying L: Well, it's not mine exactly. It was there when we moved in.

Student #4: So what does it eat?

Lying L: Different stuff. Like in the movie.

Student #1: I'd like to see this thing.

Student #2: Me, too.

Student #3: Let's go over to your house right now.

Student #4: Great idea.

Lying L: (embarrassed) It might be sleeping.

Student #1: That's okay. I'd rather be around when it's sleeping than when it's eating!

Lying L: It might not be there.

Student #2: Why not?

Lying L: Well, it likes to move around a lot. Sometimes it's there, and sometimes it's not.

[Teacher: The other students don't believe Lying L. What might they say?]

Student #3: I don't think you have a snake. I think you're making it all up.

Student #4: Yeah, I think you're lying.

All Students: Liar! Liar!

Lying L: I am not!

All Students: Then show us your snake.

Lying L: (sadly) I can't. I don't have a snake.

All Students: (exiting stage left) Liar! Liar!

[Lying L is left alone on the stage]

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think Lying L made up the story about the snake?
2. If Lying L wanted to join the group, what are some things Lying L could have done?
3. Have you ever told a lie or known someone who told a lie? How did you feel? How did you feel about the other people?

TALES FROM THE TREES

Note: This play is really three plays in one, each taking place in a forest. The plays may be presented separately or as a group. If they are presented as a group, then a good way to separate them is to have a student introduce each with a title card.

I. All for One

Plot Outline: A lumberjack is looking for a tree branch to make a new ax handle. All the large trees argue that their branches are unsuitable. But when the lumberjack spots a smaller tree, the larger trees do not stick up for the smaller one. Instead, they agree that its branches should be used. The lumberjack makes a new handle out of one of the smaller tree's branches and uses the repaired ax to chop down the larger trees, thus teaching the audience the importance of standing up for others.

Setting: A forest. Three students pretend to be large trees by standing on chairs in the center of the stage. A fourth student near the others also assumes a "tree-like" pose but stands on the floor since he or she is playing a smaller tree.

[A lumberjack enters from stage right]

[Teacher: The lumberjack needs some wood to make a new ax handle but can't decide which tree to cut. What do you think the lumberjack might say?]

Lumberjack: Just my luck. I have lots of work to do and my ax handle breaks. Well, I guess I'll have to make a new one. I wonder where I can find a good branch. (He begins examining the larger trees) Hmmmm.

[Teacher: What do you think the trees would say?]

Tree #1: Don't use me.

Lumberjack: (surprised) Who said that?

Tree #1: Me.

Lumberjack: I didn't know trees could talk.

Tree #1: I didn't know humans could hear.

Tree #2: Maybe this one is smarter than the rest.

Tree #3: He does look smart.

Tree #1: Too smart.

Lumberjack: Too smart for what?

Tree #2: Too smart to want to take one of our branches.

Lumberjack: But I have to make a new ax handle. I'm a lumberjack.

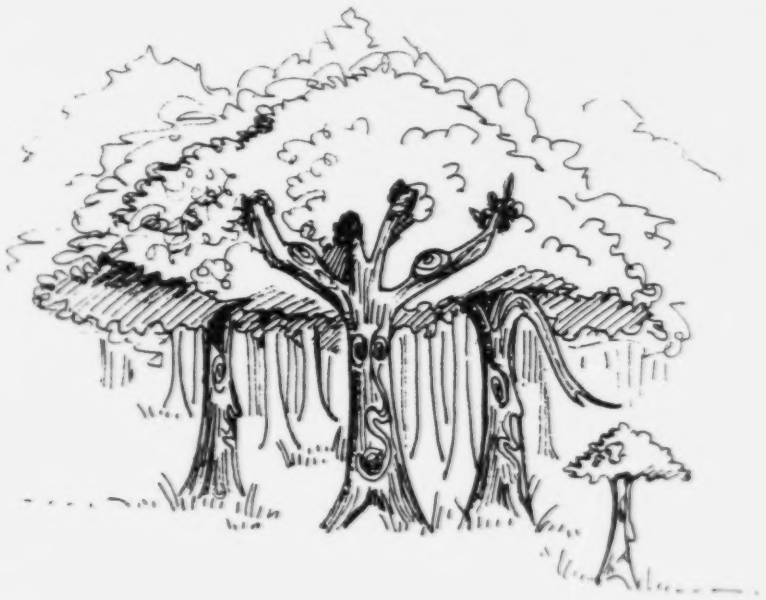
[Teacher: What could the trees say to convince the lumberjack not to take their branches?]

Tree #3: But look how thick and big our branches are.

Tree #1: You might hurt yourself trying to break one of them.

Lumberjack: (pointing to the small tree) I bet one of its branches would be good.

[Teacher: What do you think the large trees would say if they wanted the lumberjack to take one of the small tree's branches, and what do you think the small tree would say?]



Tree #2: I bet you're right. Why don't you take one of its branches.

Small Tree: Hey, wait a minute!

Tree #3: That right. Its branches are small.

Small Tree: Come on. We have to stand up for each other.

Tree #1: Why should we stand with you?

Tree #2: Imagine that puny tree thinking it's one of us.

[Teacher: What could the small tree say to convince the others that all trees are alike?]

Small Tree: But I am one of you. I live in the forest. I'm made of wood. I need sunlight and water to live, just like you. And if you give me time, one day I'll be just as big as you. We have to stand up for each other.

[Teacher: The other trees do not want to help the small tree. What do you think they would say?]

Tree #3: The only one I'm going to stand up for is me.

Tree #1: That goes for me, too.

Tree #2: And me.

Tree #3: Go ahead and take it.

[The lumberjack goes over to the small tree and pulls up and down on one of its arms until the "branch" snaps off. The small tree hides its "broken" branch behind his or her back.]

Small Tree: Ouch!

[The lumberjack pretends to put a new handle on the ax and begins chopping down the large trees, who jump off their chairs and fall to the floor]

[Teacher: What do you think the large trees would say?]

Tree #1: You weren't supposed to take us!

Tree #2: Help!

Tree #3: Don't kill me!

Lumberjack: (after all the large trees have fallen) Better go get my truck. (exits stage left)

Small Tree: (sadly) I told you we should have stood up for each other.

Discussion Questions

1. Why didn't the large trees help the small tree?
2. How could the large trees have helped the small tree?
3. Why do you think it was important for the large trees to help the small tree? What do you think would have happened if the large trees had helped the small tree?
4. When is it important for people to stick together? What would you do if a big person wanted to beat up somebody small?

II. It Is Better To Bend Than To Break

Plot Outline: A mighty oak is bragging about its strength to a young tree when a strong wind begins to blow. The oak laughs as the young tree sways and bends in the wind but soon learns that it is better to bend than to break.

Setting: A forest. One student pretends to be a mighty oak tree by standing on a chair. Another student pretends to be a young tree by standing on the floor.

[Teacher: The oak is proud to be so big and strong. What do you think the oak would say?]

Oak Tree: I am the mighty oak tree. Nothing in the world is bigger and stronger than I am.

[Suddenly the wind begins to blow. A group of students portray the wind by moving across the stage. They blow around the trees

and make appropriate sounds. The small tree twists and sways in the wind. The oak stands still. The students should continue blowing around the stage while the oak is talking but should do so quietly.]

[Teacher: If the oak thinks the small tree is a weakling because it bends in the wind, what do you think the oak would say?]

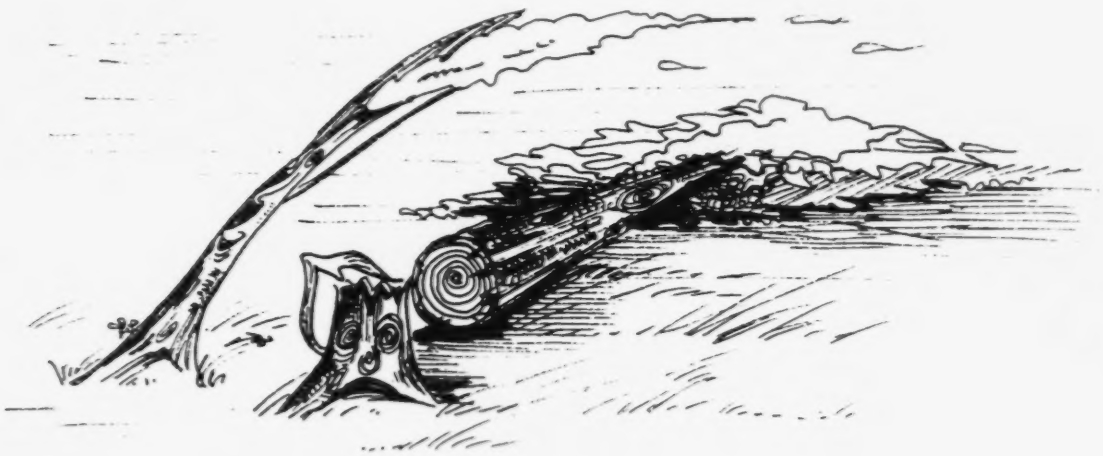
Oak Tree: Look at that puny tree bending in the wind. I'm not going to bend to any wind. I am the mighty oak!

[Suddenly the wind blows with more force. The students should make loud noises and begin to move faster around the stage. The young tree sways and bends violently, and suddenly the oak begins to topple.]

Oak Tree: (jumping from the chair and falling to the ground) Oh-h-h-h.

[The wind exits stage left]

Small Tree: (to the audience) It is better to bend than to break.



Discussion Questions

1. What do you think the young tree meant by saying "It is better to bend than to break"?

2. Who was really stronger, the mighty oak or the small tree?

III. Strength in Numbers

Plot Outline: A forester is uprooting trees to take back to the city. Some trees are uprooted easily, but the remaining trees join together and are saved, thus showing that there is strength in numbers.

Setting: A forest. Five students are pretending to be trees. Three of the trees stand close together. Two others stand apart.

[Forester, carrying a rope, enters from stage right]

[Teacher: The forester wants to pull up some trees and sell them in the city. What do you think the forester would say?]

Forester: These look like beauties. I should get a lot of money for them. (goes to one of the trees standing alone) This one looks easy to pull out. (puts rope around the tree and pretends to pull hard until the "tree" is uprooted and falls to the ground)

[Teacher: The other trees are worried that they, too, will be uprooted. What do you think they would say?]

Tree #1: Look at that.

Tree #2: What are we going to do?

Tree #3: I don't want to go to the city.

Tree #4: Think, think!

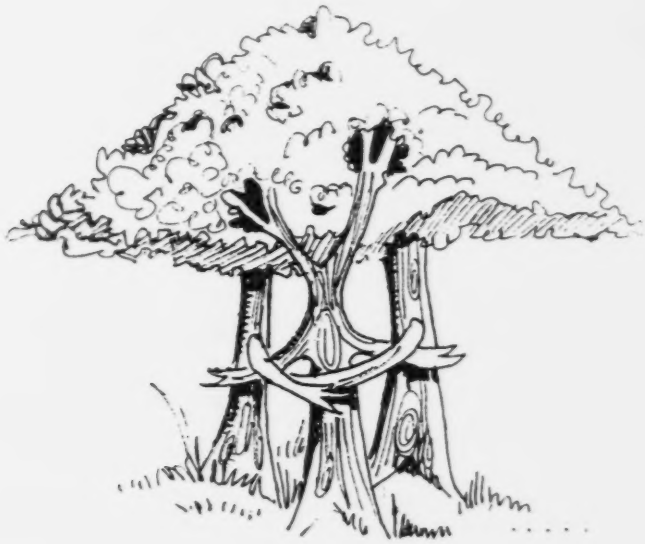
[The forester puts the rope around the Tree #4, standing alone, and uproots it]

Tree #1: He's going to get us all!

Tree #2: I have an idea.

Tree #3: What is it?

Tree #2: Let's hold onto each other (they join arms). Hold on tight!



[The forester puts the rope around the three trees and pulls and pulls but is unable to uproot them]

Forester: These trees are too tough for me. I better try somewhere else. (exits stage)

All Trees: We did it. Hurrah! Looks like it pays to stand together.

Discussion Questions

1. Why was the forester able to uproot one tree at a time but not three at a time?
2. Can you think of times in real life when people can do do something together that they can't do alone?